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10 June 1964

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MEMORANDUM FOR THE DIRECTOR

SUBJECT: Disclosure to the USSR of US Satellite Reconnaissance

SUMMARY

A. We have reviewed once again the question of revealing to the USSR the nature and extent of the US reconnaissance satellite program. In our reexamination we have taken account of ~~some~~ new developments since March 1963, when NSAM 216 decided against any such disclosure.

B. We continue to believe that this decision is justified. In particular, we feel that disclosures, either in public, or privately to Soviet officials, would ^{endanger} seriously compromise the effectiveness of the reconnaissance program, without guaranteeing any specific advantages to the US. Further, we believe that there still is a significant risk that the USSR would eventually try to stop or limit the US effort through international maneuvering or countermeasures. Very restricted and carefully handled

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disclosure in private might illuminate Soviet attitudes toward the use of satellite reconnaissance for inspection of disarmament. Even in this case, however, the US should recognize that, first of all, the Soviets will try to turn this issue to their advantage in the Cuban situation, by urging the termination of U-2 flights. Indeed, we think this is the primary purpose of recent interviews by Khrushchev, in which he seemed to give the stamp of approval to satellite reconnaissance for military intelligence purposes.

DISCUSSION

1. Satellite photography of the USSR is the essential intelligence means for estimating the present and potential strength of the Soviet strategic striking forces. In the foreseeable future we see no other means of obtaining such reliable information. Moreover, as the Soviets continue to change and modify their missile programs, with new systems in test, hardening of sites, possible camouflage, and apparent long gaps in new deployments, the value of satellite reconnaissance will be even greater. Disclosure to the USSR of this program, therefore, would have to serve vital US national interests. Prospective gains for the US from either official or private disclosure should be measured against the risks of reducing the effectiveness or destroying the usefulness of the program.

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Risks to the US

2. In either public or private disclosures the US risks the loss of vital information. We currently estimate that the Soviets have learned a great deal about the ^{as fairly good knowledge} ~~subject and~~ effectiveness of US photography. But there are probably still questions in their minds as to the details. Once the subject was raised, they would almost certainly try to learn as much as possible about the US program. If satellite reconnaissance were linked to disarmament controls, they would probably propose an exchange of photography, or even some cooperative ventures. Any exchange would not only clear up some Soviets doubts, but would also reveal what the US may have failed to detect. On the basis of such disclosures, the USSR would be in an ideal position to consider countermeasures such as deception and camouflage. Such disclosure would also probably serve to speed up programs for hardening missile sites or producing more mobile systems. In the end the Soviets might propose that both sides refrain from using outer space for intelligence gathering. Thus the US would risk a serious compromise of its program without any guarantee that the end result would be to the US advantage.*

* If some photography is revealed, some of the risks to the US could be mitigated if photography of the USSR is excluded, only low grade KH-4 photography is used and little photo-interpretation of military installations is supplied.

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Cuba

3. A new consideration is that public or private revelations to the Soviets of our reconnaissance satellite program would seriously undercut the present US position with respect to aerial reconnaissance of Cuba. The obvious purpose of Khrushchev's interviews with Benton and Pearson was to urge the US to abandon the U-2 overflights of Cuba and rely instead on satellite reconnaissance, as Castro suggested in his May Day speech. If the US discloses its satellite reconnaissance capabilities, the Soviets will almost certainly take up the Cuban question. The US would be confronted with a difficult choice. In order to convince the Soviets that the US program had broken down the barriers of military secrecy and opened the way to inspection of disarmament agreements the US would have to make a convincing case. But such an effort could backfire, if the Soviets maintained that the US data proved Castro's contention that the US flew the U-2 only to "humiliate" Cuba.

Possible Advantages

4. There are two possible US interests that might be advanced by public revelations of satellite reconnaissance capabilities. First, there is the possibility that official confirmation might help to create an international acceptance of this practice. Second,

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there is the opportunity to use the capabilities of satellite photography to convince the USSR that military secrecy was no longer a valid objection to on-site inspection of disarmament measures.

5. A public announcement might help to gain international acceptance, particularly in view of Khrushchev's interviews confirming that the USSR has used its satellites for photography. A certain tacit understanding thus seems to have already come about, as reflected in Khrushchev's remarks. An official confirmation by the US, however, might jeopardize this delicate state of affairs. The official Soviet position is still highly critical of US use of outer space for various intelligence purposes. A public disclosure might force the USSR into a campaign along this line, rather than confirm the informal position of Khrushchev, which was largely intended for Western consumption and confined to the Cuban situation.

6. As to the disarmament question, this is a double-edged sword. The Soviets would almost certainly argue that satellite photography made on site inspection superfluous. In any ensuing debate on the value of satellite reconnaissance to check on disarmament, the US might be forced to back up its arguments with evidence. Having learned as much as possible about the US program,

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the Soviets could still call for a halt of satellite reconnaissance, offering to sacrifice their own program, while taking steps to deceive or foil the US effort.

Private Versus Public Disclosure

7. There are decided advantages to using private channels instead of a public announcement. Obviously, in a private dialogue with the Soviets the US retains more flexibility, avoids the impressions of a negotiation, and keeps open the option of a later public announcement, if the Soviet response is favorable to the US purpose. Moreover, the Soviets are apt to be more forthcoming in private than if they are compelled to engage in public exchanges. Finally, the international aspects of satellite reconnaissance, i.e., UN involvements, could be sidestepped. Once a public announcement had been made the US would have no choice but to defend the legality and necessity of its program against whatever tactics the Soviets might devise, or any adverse international reactions.

8. A carefully handled and strictly limited disclosure to the Soviets in private may be less dangerous now than last year. Several events have intervened to reduce the risks that the Soviets would react strongly against the US. First, there is the improvement in US-Soviet relations since the test ban treaty, and the

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further deterioration of Sino-Soviet relations. Second, the Soviets have begun a satellite reconnaissance program of their own, which is probably of considerable value to them. Third, Khrushchev has publicly provided an opening for a US initiative. Finally, the Soviets have hinted that they recognize that the Soviet and US programs do have an effect on the question of inspection and control of armaments. Thus, some of the risk in taking this up with Moscow has declined, if the Cuban aspect of the matter could be handled.

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